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UNCLAS ROME 003899

SIPDIS

FROM US MISSION TO UN AGENCIES ROME

DEPARTMENT FOR IO, PRM, DEPT. PLEASE PASS USAID/DCHA, USDA/FAS
(CHAMBLISS), VIENNA ALSO FOR UNVIE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: FAO RELUCTANT TO CLARIFY POSITION ON GM FOOD AID, EVEN
TO ALLEVIATE HUNGER IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

REF: 1) USUN 1978, 2) STATE 147644, 3) ROME 3676

1. SUMMARY - ACTING PERMREP AND AG COUNSELOR MET WITH TOP
LEVEL FAO OFFICIALS TO EXPRESS GRAVE CONCERN WITH
GUIDANCE THAT IS BEING DISSEMINATED IN SOUTHERN AFRICAN
COUNTRIES BY FAO REPRESENTATIVES. FAO'S MIXED MESSAGE
HAS MADE LOCAL GOV'T OFFICIALS MORE RELUCTANT TO ACCEPT
U.S. FOOD AID LIKELY TO CONTAIN GENETICALLY MODIFIED (GM)
CORN. US PERMREP URGED FAO TO CLARIFY GUIDANCE TO THE
FIELD. FAO OFFICIALS PROMISED TO INFORM DIRECTOR GENERAL
(DG) JACQUES DIOUF OF U.S. DEMARCHE, BUT WE BELIEVE
RESPONSE MAY BE INSUFFICIENT TO REMOVE DOUBTS ABOUT GM
CONTENT OF FOOD AID. END SUMMARY

2. US PERM REP AND AG COUNSELOR MET ON AUGUST 7 WITH SENIOR
ADVISOR TO FAO DG MICHEL SAVINI AND ASSISTANT DG LOUISE
FRESCO TO URGE FAO TO TAKE THE LEAD IN ALLEVIATING
CONCERN ABOUT GM CONTENT OF U.S. FOOD AID TO SOUTHERN
AFRICAN COUNTRIES. THE UNITED STATES HAS RECEIVED A
NUMBER OF INDEPENDENT REPORTS FROM RESPONSIBLE OFFICIALS
IN THE FIELD INDICATING THAT FAO REPRESENTATIVES IN THE
REGION HAVE BEEN ADVISING GOVERNMENTS ON FOOD SAFETY
ASPECTS OF GM CORN. FURTHERMORE, WHAT IS MOST DISTURBING
IS THAT THIS ADVICE MAY BE CONTRARY TO ACCEPTED FAO
POLICY. IT APPARENTLY DOES NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THAT
CURRENT SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE CONCEDES THAT THERE IS NO RISK
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TO HUMAN HEALTH FROM GM FOODS, A RESULT WHICH IS
ESPECIALLY CRUCIAL IN LIGHT OF THE CURRENT CRISIS IN
SOUTHERN AFRICA. LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS HAVE BEEN
CONFUSED ABOUT POTENTIAL RISKS WHICH HAS GENERATED FEAR
AND LED TO INACTION.

3. SAVINI AGREED WITH U.S. CHARACTERIZATION OF THE SITUATION
IN SOUTHERN AFRICA BUT STATED FAO HAD ALREADY TAKEN
REMEDIAL ACTION. HE CITED THE DG'S LETTER DATED JULY 25 TO
UN UNDER SECRETARY FOR HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS OSHIMA
(ALSO SENT TO U/S ALAN LARSON UNDER A SEPARATE COVER
LETTER DATED JULY 31) WHICH AIMED AT CORRECTING
MISINFORMATION CONTAINED IN HIS JULY 10TH LETTER. THE
EARLIER LETTER'S REFERENCE TO THE CARTAGENA PROTOCOL
APPEARS TO BE AMONG REASONS FOR MISLEADING INFORMATION
BEING PROVIDED BY FAO REPRESENTATIVES TO AFRICAN
GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS. IN THE U.S. VIEW, THE JULY 25 LETTER
STILL PROVIDES NO CLEAR GUIDANCE ON FOOD SAFETY ASPECTS
OF GM FOODS.

4. FODAG OFFICIALS URGED FAO TO ISSUE CLEAR GUIDANCE TO
REPRESENTATIVES IN ALL SOUTHERN AFRICAN COUNTRIES
AFFECTED BY DROUGHT IMMEDIATELY TO COUNTERACT CURRENT
CONFUSION. SAVINI REMARKED THAT THE DG COULD NOT
ENDORSE GMO'S BEFORE THE REVIEW PROCESS UNDERWAY IN
CODEX ALIMENTARIUS IS COMPLETED WITHOUT RISKING
POLITICAL REPERCUSSIONS AT THE NEXT FAO COUNCIL MEETING.
U.S. REP COUNTERED THAT THERE COULD ALSO BE ADVERSE
REACTION IF PEOPLE ARE STARVING DUE TO THEIR GOVERNMENTS
RELUCTANCE TO ACCEPT U.S. FOOD AID. ADG FRESCO COMMENTED
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THAT AT MOST, THE FAO COULD SAY THAT THERE IS NO EVIDENCE
THAT ANY ILL EFFECTS CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO GMO'S SINCE
GMO'S APPEARED ON THE U.S. MARKET IN THE 1990'S.

5. THE U.S REPRESENTATIVES AGAIN URGED FAO TO USE ITS VOICE OF
INTERNATIONAL RESPECT AND AUTHORITY TO SPEAK OUT
CLEARLY AND FORCEFULLY TO POLICY MAKERS AND OTHER
OPINION LEADERS ON THE SCIENTIFIC REALITY OF GM FOODS. THE
UNITED STATES BELIEVES THIS COULD MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN
RELIEVING HUMAN SUFFERING IN THE CURRENT CRISIS.

6. SAVINI ASKED FOR SPECIFIC INSTANCES WHERE MISINFORMATION
ALLEGEDLY HAD BEEN PROVIDED TO HOST GOVERNMENT
OFFICIALS BY THE FAO. THE U.S. REPRESENTATIVE SAID THAT WAS
BESIDE THE POINT. RATHER, ACTION SHOULD BE TAKEN TO

CORRECT MISINFORMATION PROMULGATED TO DATE. SAVINI
PROMISED TO CONVEY U.S. CONCERNS TO DG DIOUF, WHO IS OUT
OF THE COUNTRY, BUT COULD NOT PREDICT HIS WHAT HIS
REACTION MIGHT BE.

17. COMMENT - WE ARE NOT OPTIMISTIC TANGIBLE ACTION WILL
RESULT FROM OUR DEMARCHE, BUT WE BELIEVE WE DID BREAK
THROUGH THE FAO'S COMPLACENT ATTITUDE. WE ARE MORE

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ACTION IO-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	AF-00	AGRE-00	AID-00	CEA-01	CIAE-00
	COME-00	CTME-00	USNW-00	DODE-00	ITCE-00	WHA-00	SRPP-00
	EB-00	EXME-00	EUR-00	OIGO-00	E-00	UTED-00	VC-00
	FRB-00	HHS-01	H-01	SSA-01	TEDE-00	INR-00	ITC-01
	L-00	VCE-00	AC-01	NSAE-00	NSCE-00	OES-01	OIC-02
	OMB-01	OPIC-01	ACE-00	SP-00	SSO-00	STR-00	TEST-00
	TRSE-00	USIE-00	PRM-00	DRL-02	G-00	NFAT-00	SAS-00
	/013W						

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R 090531Z AUG 02
FM AMEMBASSY ROME
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 5324
INFO EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
SADC COLLECTIVE
AMEMBASSY NAIROBI
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
USMISSION GENEVA
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

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CONFIDENT THAT WFP ED, JIM MORRIS, WHO WAS RECENTLY
NAMED SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE UN SECRETARY
GENERAL FOR THE DROUGHT IN SOUTHERN AFRICA, WILL ACT
SWIFTLY. WE UNDERSTAND MORRIS HAS BEEN CHARGED WITH
TAKING ACTION IN CONSULTATION WITH FAO AND WHO.
HOWEVER, HE DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE WAITING FOR THESE OTHER
UN AGENCIES TO WAKE UP TO WHAT IS HAPPENING IN SOUTHERN
AFRICA AND POTENTIALLY DIRE CONSEQUENCES OF THE CURRENT
DROUGHT BEFORE HE STARTS THE RELIEF EFFORT. END COMMENT.
HEILEMAN

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